Pulpit Preaching

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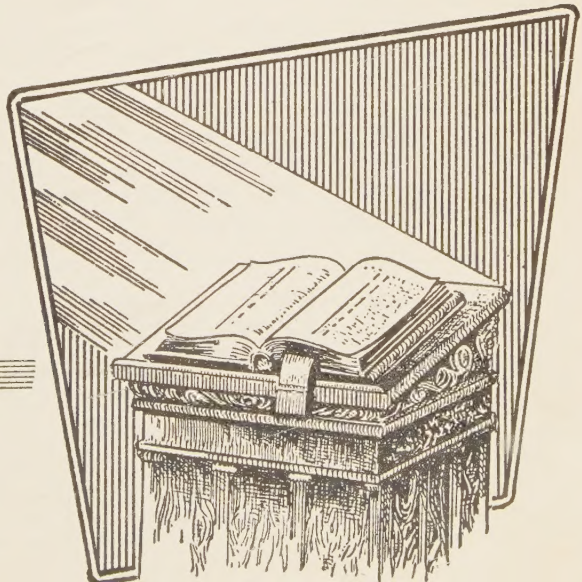

A PROFESSIONAL JOURNAL FOR MINISTERS

Editorial Comments

Each month we attempt to introduce new writers to PULPIT PREACHING readers. We invite readers to send us sermons for the consideration of their colleagues. Of course, we cannot use all manuscripts submitted, but we do extend our cordial invitation especially to those men whose minds and thought have not previously been included in these pages.

This month's emphases are "Pentecost," sermons on the Church and churchmanship, and "Sermons That Sparkle," messages on unusual themes written in ways not quite ordinary.

Next month's themes will be "Living by Faith" and "Gospel Portraits."

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Books For Pulpit Preaching

Twentieth Century Bible Commentary, edited by G. Henton Davies, Alan Richardson and Charles L. Wallis, is the most useful one-volume commentary of this generation. Embracing the most recent studies in biblical topics and devotional in tone, this book is actually many books in one. General articles by acknowledged specialists concern such subjects as inspiration, miracles, the land and the people of Palestine, Biblical archaeology. The book also includes discussions on the literature, language and theology of the Old Testament and other chapters deal with the New Testament world, the live and thought of Christ and Paul and Christian doctrine. Eighteen articles on special topics are followed by a chapter by chapter analysis of the Bible books and sixteen full-page colored maps. This book will prove to be immediately helpful to pastors and teachers as well as laymen. (Harper, 571 pp., $6.95).

Unfinished Business (Short diversions on more than 100 religious themes) by Halford E. Luccock includes material that is fresh and stimulating and enough suggestive

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Worth Quoting

James Truslow Adams, the American historian, wrote this: "Perhaps it would be a good idea, fantastic as it sounds, to muffle every telephone, halt every motor, and stop all activity some day, to give people a chance to ponder for a few minutes on what it is all about, why they are living and what they really want." It would be hard to think of one sentence which would put more strongly the case for worship and church attendance. That is what worship does, among other things—it gives us a chance to think what life is all about.

Halford E. Luccock in *Unfinished Business* (Harpers)

* * * *

In banking circles the phrase, "dead money," has a specific, technical meaning. It is used to describe the forgotten money on deposit in national banks. We might think, offhand, that people who put money in the bank would certainly remember it. But that is by no means true. National banks alone hold fifty million dollars in 2,329,678 accounts whose owners are never heard from. There it is, fifty million dollars on the books or in the vaults—dead! . . . In the Christian view of life, there is another sort of dead money—that which is never invested in human life. The Biblical phrase: "Passed from death unto life," may apply to a person's pocketbook as well as to a person's soul. How much of our money is "dead" in that sense, so that it never ministers to the lives of people?

Halford E. Luccock

* * * *

One trouble with most of us is that we have always associated faith with the supernatural, something for Sunday which has nothing to do with Monday. But faith is something that can give us riches every moment of the time in everyday affairs of our lives. The farmer sows his seed, and you watch him reaping the harvest; and you

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Pulpit Preaching

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ARMIN C. OLDSEN
JOHN C. MIDDLEKAUFF
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O. F. JORDAN

The Birthday of the Christian Church

ARMIN C. OLDSEN, St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, Lakeville, Ohio

Then they that gladly received his Word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. — Acts 2:41.

Today we observe a birthday anniversary. It's not the kind of anniversary that is likely to be mentioned in the day's news report. Yet when the history of the world is finally written, as God would write it, the event we are commemorating will stand out as one of the greatest happenings of all times. This is the anniversary of the birthday of the Christian Church.

When we celebrate a birthday anniversary there is usually some reference to the birthday itself. Mother may say, "It was a cold day when you were born." Father may say, "The first look I had at you was not too encouraging. I wondered what you would look like when you grew up." Aunt Martha may say, "You were a pretty baby."

It is a strange story the Bible tells us about what happened the day the Christian Church was born. It was a holiday that fell on a Sunday. Sunday was then a workday. But Sunday became the memorial of two great events that occurred only seven weeks apart: Easter, the day Christ rose from the dead, and Pentecost, the day the Christian Church was born. It was a solemn festival day which like a great bell had drawn many visitors to Jerusalem from all parts of Palestine and from countries near and far. It was then already an anniversary day, at least it appears so to many Bible students. It was the day on which all Israel commemorated the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai, almost 1500 years earlier.

ONE ACCORD

God chose the great city of Jerusalem as the site where the Christian Church was to be born. The exact spot is not known. The Bible record says simply, "They were all with one accord in one place." The "they" refers to more than the Apostles. It includes the larger number of Christ's disciples. But there could not have been a tremendous crowd for one place was big enough for all of them. At its birth the Christian Church was small, pitifully small compared with the great, world-wide institution into which it has developed. It was frightfully small compared with the forces that were arrayed against it.

At the beginning the members of the Christian Church were "in one accord." The first followers of Christ were not merely in one group physically. They were one in heart and spirit. There was harmony among them. They were truly a communion of saints. The memory of their Lord's crucifixion and death was still vivid. They had suffered deep anxiety together. Humbly they had prayed together. Tragedy has great welding force, whether it gets hold of a nation, a family, or the Church. No wonder "they were all with one accord in one place." When God-fearing, Christ-loving people are all with one accord in one place great things are likely to happen. They certainly happened that day in Jerusalem.

Suddenly an unusual wind arose, coming from heaven where God is said to gather the winds in His hands. It attracted attention to what was about to happen. It was as though God was saying, "Your attention, please!" A visible sign was added. Small tongues of fire appeared above each head. It was as though God was saying, "This is important!" News of the strange happenings spread quickly. A curious, puzzled crowd gathered. The disciples began to speak languages they had never learned. The Medes who were visiting in Jerusalem heard their language spoken; the Arabians heard theirs. It was as though God was saying, "This is for everyone!" In bewilderment they all asked, "What does this mean?" The answer was, "The Holy Spirit has come." Christ's promise to send the Comforter was going into fulfillment. Prompted by the Holy Spirit the disciples spoke of the wonderful works of God. It was the Christmas message, the Good Friday message, the Easter message, all rolled into one.

PETER'S SERMON

Peter preached a sermon to fit the oc-

casion, speaking with power never before demonstrated and with insight that was clearly God-inspired. Peter pointed out that the strange things that were happening had been foretold by God. They concerned Jesus Christ who had performed miracles in that very city a few short months before. In that city Christ had been condemned to death less than two months earlier. Many of those who heard Peter had seen Christ die outside the city wall. They shared in the guilt of that infamous spectacle. God had raised Christ from the dead, as their great King David, whose grave was a thousand years old, had known He would. They had all been disturbed by the story of Christ's resurrection. Now came Peter's climax, "Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom you have crucified, both Lord and Christ."

The setting was dramatic. Peter's sermon went to the heart. A few tried to laugh it off with ridicule. Most of them stirred uneasily. Not only had they had a part in killing a Man, but that Man had been their long-awaited Messiah. Fear laid hold on them. Regret overwhelmed them. They cried, "Men and brethren, what shall we do?" Peter's ready answer was, "Repent, and be baptized everyone of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call."

Many who had been frightened by Peter's sermon accepted his invitation with joy. There was no doubt about it, they were sinners. They were sorry for all the wrong they had done. In faith they turned to Christ their Savior and found forgiveness. They were baptized. Three thousand of them joined the Christian Church on its birthday. Christ had once filled Peter's net with fish and had promised him, "Thou shalt catch men." That promise was fulfilled in stirring manner on the first New Testament Pentecost. And the glorious history of Christianity was being written.

GOD'S GIFT

All this would have been impossible if God had not given His Church a birthday gift. And what a gift it was! It was bound to be something outstanding because God Himself gave it. Christ had promised it in the words, "But the Comforter which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you." He had repeated the promise, "I will send the Comforter." There is a picture in the twelfth chapter of the Book of Revelation from the inspired pen of St. John, that underscores as with a red pencil the need the newborn Church had for help. A woman, clothed with the sun and with a crown of twelve stars on her head, is about to have a child. But there stands a red dragon, ready to devour the infant as soon as it is born. The woman flees into the wilderness where God Himself has prepared a place for her. She is carried by the wings of an eagle. The earth swallows up a flood that threatens to overtake her. God Himself rescues the child. That may be a strange picture, but it fits the early history of the new-born Church. There were a number of dragons standing about ready to devour the infant Church. But God sent His Comforter to strengthen, protect, and direct His still feeble Church.

The Christian Church was born in a wilderness of strife and misery. There was conflict and unrest in the world. No unlettered Peter would have been able by himself to convict 3,000 souls of sin and to bring them to the Savior. The disciples had demonstrated no unusual spiritual insight. There had been no impressive display of heroism. A few weeks before they had been timid and faint-hearted men. On Pentecost they had a clear knowledge and understanding of the way of salvation. They were able to express themselves convincingly. Before friend and foe they fearlessly gave voice to their heroic faith. It was the gift of the Holy Spirit that made the difference.

SUSTAINING SPIRIT

It is the Holy Spirit who has sustained the Church during the last nineteen centuries. The world has never treated the Christian Church kindly. Do you remember the vision that John Bunyan had? A man was throwing water on a fire, yet like the burning bush Moses saw in the wilderness, the fire did not go out. Then he discovered why it burned on in spite of all the water. Some one was standing behind a door continually pouring oil on the fire. Water keeps pouring over the Church and over the enthusiasm of those who work in it, but God's Spirit continues to pour the oil of faith, courage, and wisdom into the hearts of those who labor in the Lord's vineyard.

It is not the treasure of the Church's art, nor its liturgy, nor its system of theology, nor its organizational set-up, nor its beautiful churches, nor its choirs, nor its preach-

ers, that are first of all responsible for the growth and development of the Christian Church, important as they may all be. It is the Holy Spirit, working through eloquent preachers, and beautiful churches, and well organized groups.

Who is the Holy Spirit? With God the Father and God the Son He completes the Trinity of God. Like God, He is invisible, eternal, all-knowing, all-wise, loving. What is it that He does? Luther explained it well when he said, "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." The Holy Spirit takes all the benefits gained for humanity by Christ, forgiveness of sins, the courage in knowing that God is again our loving protecting Father, the hope of eternal salvation, and applies them to the individual heart.

The heart of man is generally indifferent to its sinful condition. It must be shown that where there is sin, God is shut out and there can be no eternal salvation. It is not human logic that brings man to repent of his sin and to trust in Christ the Savior. The eloquence of man does not in itself convert the sinner. That is the work of the Spirit of God. He was given to the newborn Church as a birthday gift. It is still a precious gift.

Your Debt to the Church

JOHN C. MIDDLEKAUFF, Stone Church of the Brethren, Huntingdon, Penna.

I am under obligation (RSV). I owe a debt (A.V.) I am debtor (KJV)
—Romans 1:14.

People of character, decency and respectability try to keep their bills paid and stay out of debt. They like to look the world straight in the eye and say, "I don't owe a cent!" But according to some figures recently released by the Chamber of Commerce of the United States of America, not too many of us can say that we are free of debt. Its figures reveal that the average family owes close to $2,900, not including the $6,008 per family represented by the national debt.

Not only are most of us in debt financially but all of us are in debt to many people and institutions. In our text, Paul acknowledges his debt to all men, "I am debtor to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians; both to the wise, and to the unwise." As citizens of a democracy, we are indebted to our nation and its founders for freedoms, opportunities and blessings that few other nations enjoy. As citizens of this community, we are indebted for the blessings of pure water, public schools, paved and lighted streets, police protection and numerous other blessings.

Let us consider a debt we frequently forget—our debt to the Church of Jesus Christ. It is a debt owed, not only by the members of the Church but one involving even those who are not a part of it. Since you may think it strange that those who do not belong to the Church owe a debt to the Church, let us look at this group first.

Right-thinking people who are not members of the Christian Church will concede that the Church produces men and women of character and integrity, law-abiding citizens and people who attempt to live up to high moral and ethical standards. Can you imagine what it would be like to try to run a business in a building the kind of character you generally associate with church people? Much of our prosperity is based on credit buying. Would you want to give credit to people who did not subscribe to honesty, truthfulness, whose word could not be trusted? Would you want to be in business in a community where the Church was not at work producing Christian character? Would you, as the director of a bank, want to employ a staff of men and women who were not church members?

Those of us who are parents are interested in the kind of friends our children have. As they grow into the age of romance and marriage, would you want to live in a community where the Church was not at work influencing the youth toward the ideals of purity, sobriety, honesty and integrity?

NON-ACTIVE MEMBERS

There are many people in our communities who are not active members of the Church of Christ, and yet they profit from the presence of the Church. Property values are higher, life is more pleasant, the community is a safer place in which to live and its citizens are finer people because the Church is here. These people owe the Church a debt. Even the children recognize the value of the Church and Sunday School. A

Louisville, Kentucky woman, very active in church work, had walked over to the edge of the swimming pool to watch the youngsters at play. She was thoroughly enjoying their fun when a 13-year-old boy ran up to her and asked, "Say, lady, do you go to Sunday School?" "Why, yes, I do" she replied a bit surprised. "Then," he said, "please hold this twenty-five cents for me while I go into the pool."

It is significant that President Eisenhower united with the Church soon after being inaugurated as the President of the United States of America. Until that time, his unsettled life in the military made it impossible for him to have a church home. Shortly after he took office, he attended a breakfast of the International Christian Leadership group in Washington and there he made this confession of faith: "There is a need we all have in these days and times for some help which comes from outside ourselves as we face the multitude of problems that are part of this confusing situation . . ." *The Christian Century*, in commenting on his uniting with the Presbyterian Church, suggested that this act was "a certain humble acknowledgment of need for the spiritual reinforcement which membership in a church might bring. It demonstrated also a sensitive recognition that among other things he owed it to the nation to provide in his own life an example in allegiance to and support of the institutions of religion."

If those outside the Church owe a debt to the Church, those who are a part of its fellowship owe it an even greater debt.

THE CHURCH HOME

In the first place, those of us who belong to the Church owe it a debt because it provides us with a home. Those who have made a study of man tell us that every individual has two basic longings: the sense of belonging and the feeling of being wanted. Our homes minister to these two basic needs but in an even greater way, the Church also gives a man a sense of being wanted and loved by a fatherly God. Our earthly homes are broken as our children marry and our parents die — but the home which the Church provides lasts as long as we live, no matter where we live.

THE CHURCH FELLOWSHIP

Secondly, church people owe a debt to the Church because it provides a fellowship with the best people in the community. There are some good people in every community who are not identified with the Church, but the very best people in every community are the church people. As members of the Church, we have the priceless privilege of counting them among our friends and having fellowship with them. There are some clubs and social groups in our community that for one reason or another, some of us could not join. Some of us do not have enough money to join the Country Club. Not every man who wants to can become a member of the Lions, Rotary or Kiwanis. Only women who have graduated from college can become members of the American Association of University Women. But anyone can fulfill the requirements for church membership, and he doesn't have to be asked to join. He can take the initiative and become a member of the fellowship which is composed of the very best people in our community.

LIVING OUR BEST

The fact that the Church helps us to live our best is the third reason why we are in debt to the Church. There is not one of us who is living up to the highest and best of which he is capable, but all of us in the Church are infinitely better than we would be if we were still outside of the Church. Sunday by Sunday the Church brings us face to face with the Perfect Man, Jesus Christ. Sunday by Sunday the Church confronts us with the infinite power of a loving God—power to grow, to mature, to become like Christ. And when we sin, the Church helps us back on our feet and reminds us anew of the forgiving grace of God in Jesus Christ. All of us need the ideal of perfection to be held before our eyes, and part of the ministry of the Church is to help us be and do the very best of which we are capable.

PROBLEM OF PRIORITIES

The fourth reason why church members are in debt to the Church lies in the fact that the Church helps us with the problem of priorities. The crucial decision of life is the selection of values. To what values in life shall we give priority? The wrong decision here will wreck a life. To choose wealth, power, pleasure or fame is to choose the scrap-heap and death; to choose Christ, His Kingdom of Love and Righteousness is to choose life. And of all the institutions and organizations in the world, only the Church enables a man to choose those values which abide, those values which open the door to the abundant life. We owe a debt to the Church because we have heard the

Church say to us time and time again: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness."

IN TIME OF NEED

Last of all, I'd like to suggest that we owe the Church a debt because of the way it comes to our aid in the time of need. When we were lost in sin, the Church came to us with the Gospel of salvation. When trouble invades our lives, we don't turn to the service clubs to which we belong but for help, we turn to the Church. When death comes into the family circle, men don't turn to the VFW, the American Legion, the Elks or the Moose, but the Church even though for years they have neglected the Church. And when a son or daughter is married, men turn to the Church for its blessing. When people have problems, they generally turn to the Church and her ministers for help—and seldom does the Church fail those who sincerely seek help.

Yes, all of us are in debt to the Church. Now the man of integrity is as interested in paying his debt to the Church as he is in paying "the butcher, the baker and the candlestick maker." But how does one pay such a debt? The answer is found in faithfulness to one of the vows you took upon yourself when you united with the Church. At the time of baptism, when you were received into the Church, you made three promises, and one had to do with the Church. "Will you be loyal to the Church, upholding her by your prayers and your presence, your substance and your service?" And to that you said, "I will!"

YOUR PRAYERS

You can discharge your debt to the Church with your prayers. Here is something every person can do, no matter how infirm in body, poor in purse or lacking in talents. Everybody can pray — but I wonder how many of the members of the Church pray for the Church? What man is there who can tell what would happen if even 50% of the Church members of America would pray every day for the Church and her program, her ministers and missionaries, her institutions and agencies? Could it be that the revival so many of us have longed for would follow a revival of prayer? When you were baptized, you promised to uphold the Church with your prayers. You can pay part of your debt to the Church of Christ with the currency of prayer.

YOUR PRESENCE

Secondly, you can pay your debt to the Church with your presence. May I remind you that church attendance is not optional or elective. Jesus never allowed company, the weather, a need for extra sleep, plain laziness or indifference to keep Him from the public worship of His heavenly Father. And the New Testament Scriptures plainly command: "Let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near." We ought to attend Church even though it is hot or cold, wet or dry, whether we have a headache or backache because God desires our worship, and we need the strength and vision which comes from worship, but also because we need to give the world a visible proof of our discipleship. I am well aware that there are some hypocrites who seldom miss a church service, but I also know that the best Christians in any Church are those who can be depended upon to pay their debt to the Church with their presence.

YOUR SUBSTANCE

The third promise you made about the Church is that you would support her with your substance, your gifts, your money. And the miracle is that so many people do! Have you ever thought what a unique thing it is that of all the institutions in the world, the Church is the only one that depends for its financial support on the voluntary gifts of is members. It has no initiation fees, no dues, no assessments, only the voluntary gifts of its members. The Country Club would go bankrupt in a year on this basis and colleges would soon disappear if the students could get room, board and tuition on the same basis that the Church gets its support. As miraculous as this support of the Church is, it is also a source of constant shame and embarrassment because not all of its members are as good as their word. They promised to support the Church, but they don't. Speaking in round figures, about 50% of the members of the Church of Christ do not give a cent in a year for the support of the Church. Another 25% make token gifts. That is, they give $5 or $10 a year to the Church but they will spend $100 a year on tobacco, another $75 or more on movies, football, basketball and baseball games, another $100 on beer and cocktails. If the Church had at its disposal just half of the money that is spent by its members on extravagances, money that is wasted on luxuries or on harmful, unChristian habits,

it could embark on a program of advance and progress which would bring the Kingdom of God closer to victory in our day.

YOUR SERVICE

Last of all you promised to support the Church with your service. One of the diseases of modern Christianity is spectatoritis. Every member of the Church ought to be in some area of service in the Church. We can't all preach; not every one can sing in the choir or teach in the Sunday School. But we can all witness for Christ, we can find some place of service in one of the organizations of the Church. And there we can do the best of which we are capable.

Yes, each one of us can say with Paul, "I am debtor" — not only to "Greeks and to barbarians" but also to the Church of Christ. If you are an honorable man, you will do what you can to discharge this debt which you owe to the Church.

Is This Trip Necessary?

ROBERT E. GOODRICH, JR., First Methodist Church, Dallas, Texas

Ten years ago it was war time. Most of us remember some of the things which went along with it: ration books, gasoline stickers, priority lists. Recall how we stood in line for nearly everything we wanted. I'll never forget the woman who came home one day and told her husband, "You know, I stood in line nearly two hours down in front of a certain store today." And he said, "What were you standing in line to get?" "I don't know," she answered, "they ran out of it before I ever got inside." A good many of us went through experiences like that.

One of the things which was thoroughly impressed upon us in those days was a question, "Is this trip necessary?" A lot of people completely disregarded it, but it was hard to escape the question. You'd see it on sign boards, bulletin boards, on a ticket you bought at the depot, everywhere: is this trip necessary? And sometimes it did make you stop and think. Could you have gotten along without that trip? Wasn't there some other way to accomplish the same thing? Was it essential? Was it necessary?

The question itself is ten years old, but I would like to borrow it to ask concerning *this* trip, this trip to church. Is is essential? Is it in any sense necessary to go to church, to be a part of it? Maybe Christ did "love the church and gave himself for it," as it says in the scriptures. Maybe Paul did refer to it as the "household of faith," the "bride of Christ," the "pillar and bulwark of the truth." Maybe he saw it as the very "body of Christ." But all that was a long time ago. Is this trip essential in our day?

After all, it wasn't made without effort. There were the children: it's a job to get them all up at the same time and get them dressed at approximately the same time. The baby to be fed! The Sunday paper had to be put off until afternoon, an invitation to go out somewhere refused. All kinds of difficulties are involved. In fact, it was just too much a strain, too great a price, for a lot of people to pay. Any Sunday more than half the members of the churches find it too much of a trip to make. Almost any excuse is good enough!

There was a time when it could have been answered rather quickly. We could have simply opened a book and read the words, "The church is of God and shall be preserved until the end of time. The church is the means of grace which God has appointed for man's redemption and salvation." We could have closed the book and that would have been it! But such answers don't satisfy many of us today. We are of a different spirit, a different generation. We want an answer from the human side as it were. We want an answer that involves the processes of our logic, the reason—this power which God has given us. So we say, "But tell me why! Can you prove it?"

Let me suggest some lines of reasoning which may at least provoke some further thought. We are not raising the question as an exercise in homiletics. We want to try to get at the facts. *Is this trip necessary?*

OUTSIDE THE CHURCH

To begin with, let's note there is something of a basic contradiction in trying to be Christians outside the church. There are a lot of good, fine, charitable, just, honorable people who are outside and say, "I believe in God, I believe in following Jesus Christ, and I think I am a Christian, but no trip to church is necessary for me!" All of us know these persons whose lives have been permeated with the spirit of Christ. Or, more correctly, we know these persons whose lives have been permeated with the spirit of Christ which has been preserved by the Church through the ages and it has spilled over into their lives. We might call them

good hypocrites. Everybody talks about hypocrites and pharisees. Never a week passes that we don't hear the words. And, of course, there are hypocrites and pharisees within the church. There are lots of people who don't enter into the meaning of it. They don't begin to understand it: they are just "names," just bodies to have present. They don't really participate, are not truly a part of it. We grant this.

There are hypocrites in the church and there are hypocrites outside the church. In fact, there are hypocrites everywhere we go. There are people who stand up for what they *don't* believe, but there are others won't stand up for what they *do* believe. There are some people who profess *more* than they believe, and there are others who won't profess what they *do* believe. And you will find them in every kind of organization.

And so with persons by the score all about us; they don't stand up for what they really do believe. They stay outside and say, "I will be a Christian without the Christian church." One writer put it well when he said, "That's like saying you will be an Englishman without an England." It is only the existence of England, the concrete community with a tradition and a history, that makes it possible for anybody to be an Englishman. If you are going to be an American, you will have something to do with America, won't you? This nation may be imperfect in integrity and honor, there may be hypocrisy in high places and low, but if we are going to be Americans, we will have something to do with America! It seems to me the logic holds: there wouldn't be any Christians without the Christian church. And if I am going to be Christian, *this trip is necessary!*

OBJECT OF WORSHIP

Let's take another step. It seems to me that if we are going to keep the right object of our worship, this trip is necessary! There are some people who are always saying, "I just don't feel the need of worship maybe I've lost the capacity. I just don't ever feel the desire to participate." They may be perfectly honest in their statement; but they are absolutely mistaken in their facts. For everybody worships; everybody has the capacity. We worship all kinds of things: we worship movie stars and football heroes, we worship pleasure, we worship taverns, we worship drink, we worship money, we worship power. And some of us worship God.

It is a question, you see, of what will have first place in our worship. It's a matter of the proper object of our adoration. I have sometimes wondered what would happen if on a Sunday morning at 11 o'clock instead of a church bell ringing, a siren would sound. And that would be the signal for every single citizen to worship in *absolute honesty.* He would be required to bow down and worship what really had first place in his life. Can you imagine the resulting confusion as we all began to change places. Some would simply go to sit before a closet of beautiful clothes. Some would be required to go down to the bank and into the vault to a lock box and bow in adoration. Others would be required to go to the tavern. Some would be required to go to the theater, the worship of entertainment. Some would be required to find some symbol of power, maybe a great machine, and sit down and commune with it for awhile. Wouldn't it be amazing if there were a siren every Sunday morning at 11 o'clock instead of a bell and everybody went to worship not out of custom, not out of respectability, but out of honesty.

I remember the story of a newly rich man who was proud of the palatial estate he had built. Everything was just right. He had lots of money, and he worshipped that fact. He was showing a friend through his estate one day and took him into the great bedroom with a huge picture window looking out over the grounds. He pointed out the window; "Do you see this elm tree that is shading my picture window? That tree used to grow down there by the pond, on the side of the hill but I had them dig it up and move it up here, plant it over again so that it shades my bedroom window." His friend only commented, "My, my. It just shows you what God could do if he had money."

I don't know whether the rich man let the statement sink in deep enough to cause him to question the object of his worship, but if we are going to keep straight on it, this trip is necessary!

Some will say, "But I don't understand worship." Dr. J. B. Phillips says that during the war, he was at a Saturday night club for young people conducted by the church and other organizations in London. They had enjoyed a wonderful evening of entertainment, dancing and concerts and food. Everybody had been in a great spirit and they would cheer and sing and laugh. "I suggested to them that at the close of the evening that we could have a prayer and a

few minutes of worship," Dr. Phillips writes. "One of the young fellows came to me and said, 'But, sir, really, we don't have the faintest idea what you mean by worship." "You don't," said Dr. Phillips, "why, it is *three cheers for God.*" Three cheers for God. It's true, for a part of worship is admiration and enthusiasm and appreciation. Three cheers for God! Dr. Phillips himself says, "Maybe that is a crude way of putting it but some of the young people understood it for the first time that night and maybe it would help us to think of it that way."

Three cheers for God! It is when we come into the church that we are lifted up or reminded of how magnificent He is in his magnificent creation; and yet he became like you and me, took on the flesh of a man in Christ so that he could be with us. This is the God who made me and will remake me, restore me. This is the God who will forgive me, who will love me in spite of my failures, in spite of what I am. This is the God who won't let me alone until he makes me what I ought to be. And the cross reminds me He can always take what is worst and make it into what is best. Three cheers for one like that. Three cheers for God!

It is only when we come within the church and constantly reminded of things like that we are willing to give him our first three cheers. If we are to keep straight on the object of our worship, then *this trip is necessary.*

CHRISTIAN CONSCIENCE

If we are going to keep our Christian conscience alive, this trip is necessary. Of course, this is why some people stay away, they are afraid that something will happen in church that will stir up their conscience and they don't want it. They are like a little child, trying to do something that he knew was wrong, who kept saying, "Be quiet God, be quiet." And that is what they want. They don't want their conscience to live.

But what they fear surely most of us desire because it is obvious to us that the most terrible thing upon earth is not a body without a brain but a man without a conscience. And the most fearful thing in our day is not the mushroom smoke of an atomic explosion but a man with no ability to distinguish between good or evil, right or wrong. And we have had some unforgettable and horrible demonstrations of it in our time, and we have had some illustrations of it in our communities. Men with no conscience about killing. Men with no conscience about stealing. Men with no conscience about anything.

It is very easy for your conscience or mine to become dulled by the murk and the muck of everyday living until we lose all sense of black and white, and everything becomes a dull grey. And we can read our newspapers and things don't disturb us at all. A murder in another community or a new burst of intolerance at home—nothing disturbs. That is, not until we come to church and something reminds us that God cares about the least, last one of his children. Or we can read our newspapers and we see situations or environments that are allowed to exist which are really traps for the young people of this community—all pretty on the outside and all death on the inside. Perhaps it doesn't bother us much because ours are not involved. It hasn't touched us so we don't worry about it, we don't have any conscience about that *until* we come to church and hear the words, "Inasmuch as you did nothing for them, you have done nothing for me." And maybe your conscience is awakened! We can only really understand evil as long as we are familiar with absolute goodness, only understand ugliness as long as we are familiar with absolute beauty which is Christ.

"I hope you don't spend all your vacation in a city, especially if you live in the city, hemmed in by traffic and noises and buildings and streets and smog. When we stay in that environment we forget certain things. For instance, I almost forget what it is like to ride a mountain path and look out and see God's handiwork. Then comes vacation, and all the wonder and inspiration of it comes back in one instant. How easy it is to forget all about the masterful artifice of a sunset or a sunrise over the water or over the desert. Then comes vacation, and it all comes back as God speaks to us in beauty and nature. And it is exactly like this with conscience. We go along and we forget. We arrive at the place where evil doesn't disturb us, we forget the horror of of it. Is this trip really necessary? *It is if we are going to keep our conscience alive as a Christian.*

LIFE-LINE TO GOD

Finally, this trip is necessary if we are going to keep a life-line to God. We might as well face the fact, all of us, that sooner or later there is going to be something we can't do, we can't handle. And even if our friends come to help us, with all the human strength we can muster, we can't handle

t. We can't supply what is needed without a life-line to God. Some man put it like this n describing the lowest day of his life, the most dangerous hour of his life: "I was closest to suicide when it seemed to me that nothing I could do could possible match what needed doing." And all of us are going to come to places where, despite all the resources we can muster, we must face the fact that nothing we can do can match what needs doing in our life or in our world. The life-line to God alone can make the difference.

Let me try to tell you in a few sentences what is told over many pages of a recent book, *Report to the Creator,* by a newspaper man, author, magazine writer. He tells that when he was a boy of fourteen, he went to church, his first adult service. He had been to junior church and Sunday school, but this was the first adult service he had been in. And he said, "As I sat there in the service, something began to happen. God's holy spirit descended and was vividly present for me. And I was unspeakably happy." Then he said, "Toward the end of the service I began to be very impatient for the thing to be over so I could talk with some other people about this astonishing thing that had happened to me." When the benediction was over he began to look about, but the adults had all clustered into little groups and were talking about utterly trivial things that had nothing to do with God's holy presence. "I tried to go up to some of them but they looked down at me curiously as if to ask what I was doing, and I became tongue-tied." Then he said, "I kept on trying and finally one of them looked at me and said, 'That boy looks pale,' and another one laughed and said, 'Maybe church was too much for him,' then they all laughed and I left convinced that all adult church members were hypocrites. They didn't care about what they were supposed to worship and said they believed in."

So that began his rebellion against church and organized religion. It was a rebellion that went on for twenty-five years. For many pages he tells the story of the things that happened in those years. He "hit bottom" many times. Finally, "I began to search for something more than human and I was determined that these American Christian churches were not the way. I began with the religions of the Orient." He studied the different religions of the world, but step by step he was forced back to that one which, he said, was higher than all and contained more truth, Christianity. "I began to have a queer feeling. Could it be that the Christian church on the corners of American cities held the great secret?" Inevitably the day came when he went back to church. Then he said, "It happened to me again! They might have told me that it would; it was the same thing that happened to me when I was a boy. God's spirit came and there was an astonishing experience and I was unspeakably happy. Only this time I didn't storm out and call everybody else hypocrites. Maybe *they* didn't care. But I was determined to stay because now I am an adult. I was determined to go about and, wherever I could, to say, 'Look who is here!' "

And he continues, "I found my way back to church and I am going to stay. I'm going to stick it out. I will not call the others hypocrites, but I am going to say over and over to people, 'These are my faults. What are yours?' Sooner or later three or four will say, 'These are *my* faults, what are we going to do about them?" And he said, "I will stick it out and every time I get the chance, as loud as I can shout it, I will say, 'Look who is here—God!' "

He found, you see, when he went back what he might have had all the time—that life-line to God which made the difference and supplied that which he knew was not within his power to supply. In how many different ways could that story be told? Be sure, *this trip is necessary if we are going to keep a life-line to God.*

Is it necessary? There is a basic contradiction between trying to be a Christian without the church; like being an American without America! It is necessary if we are going to keep the object of our worship right (three cheers for God!). And it is necessary if we are going to keep a Christian conscience alive (we can recognize evil only when we know the perfect beauty of Christ). Is this trip necessary? It is if we are going to keep a life-line to God for look who's here!

Why Join a Church?

O. F. JORDAN, Community Church, Park Ridge, Illinois

Many thousands of people in the United States hold to the Christian faith, but are not active members of a church where they live. It is to these that we wish to carry a message. When invited to join a church in their own community, they often say, "Why should I?" Why indeed?

People of like interests have a way of finding each other in this social world. Hardware men have an association as do embalmers. For the interests that we really care about, we are willing to be organized. We join a garden club if we really like flowers. Those who claim to be religious, but remain outside the fellowship of religious people which is the church, miss something that organization for special interests always brings.

It is well for you to remember how church sanctifies the great events of the family life. In some denominations a child is brought to the church either for christening, as in some denominations, or for dedication as in some others. The baptismal name is the "Christian name." Very soon he learns the great hero stories of the Bible, the Ten Commandments, the Golden Rule. He is invited into a confirmation class at puberty where his pastor gives him personal instruction. His adolescent days are guided so that he avoids "getting into trouble." His romances are apt to be formed among nice people. At the time of marriage his mating is surrounded with beauty and solemnity. His choice of a vocation is given religious motivation.

Should serious problems arise in his life, he knows he can go to his pastor for counselling. When bereavement comes, he insists upon having comforting words from a minister of the gospel. If he is a member of a church, this minister is no stranger.

As great fundamental questions press upon his life, he learns to turn to the church for wisdom and guidance. Toward the end of life's journey he wants to know what he may believe about life's ultimate destiny. The church shows him that the most beautiful sky of life's experience is in the evening time. He walks toward the setting sun with a song on his lips.

SOCIETY OF FRIENDS

The church is a society of friends. In this industrialized nation where people move around so much in following their economic interest, they often find themselves lonely in a new community. Meeting the right people is the problem of a successful adjustment in the community. In illness trouble or bereavement, we all feel the need of friends. Membership in a church is likely to provide us with the right sort.

We all need stimulus in seeking the better life. Most of us tend toward the comfortable philosphy, "When in Rome, do as Rome does." Some social groups help us while others hinder. In a world where many people are missing the way, the church constantly holds up higher ideals, and provides motives for moral improvement.

It does this partly by an educational process. A good church has special study groups and forums for public address. In it the Sunday school has been modernized. It is likely that the minister keeps himself abreast of the times and that he is a faithful educator of his people through his pulpit ministry.

Through the arts of worship, the church adds warmth, light and joy to the spiritual experience, making real a sense of God and making worthful to us the life and teachings of Jesus Christ.

PERSONAL SERVICE

Membership in a church opens avenues for personal service. Most of us do not realize how selfish we may become in living isolated lives and how very unhappy we will be in this selfishness. Joining a church makes it easier for our neighbors to ask us to share in good work. Hundreds of humble ministries of a church have very much to do with the welfare of a community.

This leads us to say that a sense of community loyalty should lead any person of the Christian faith to join a local church. Most of us would not live in a town a single year if it had no church. We know how we feel toward selfish men who would cripple a school system. All of our community-building organizations should have our support. Chief among these is the church. In many ways the church serves the community interest. It saves its community more than it costs. Figure it out for yourself some day.

Looked at from the standpoint of world interests, membership in a church seems even more imperative. Around the world has spread among the common people a horror of war. It is harder and harder for selfish rulers to recruit armies and to maintain the

cooperation of civilian populations. At home and abroad the church is doing valiant service in behalf of world peace.

The church contends against the builders of class hatred. The most terrible wars are civil wars. While in favor of many social reforms, the church is not a partisan of any social class. It seeks justice and social solidarity.

As a defender of liberty, the church is of unique importance to all democracies. There can be no successful political democracy unless there is first the democratic philosphy of the inherent worth of every human life. This has been one of Christianity's great contributions to the thinking of the world.

MISSIONARY ACTIVITIES

In a world that is rotten with racial hatred, the intelligent leaders of Christianity insist that God has made of one flesh all the peoples of earth. Unfortunately many Christians are inconsistent in their attitude toward peoples of other races than their own. These people are in a rapid process of conversion to the true attitude toward the problems of race. Through its missionary activities, the church has taught millions of its members the great capabilities of people on the other side of the earth.

Through these missionary activities the church has been the effective carrier of civilization. People who were naked savages practicing cannibalism a hundred years ago are now clothed and in their right minds. This great international service of the church toward peace, liberty, social justice, racial good-will and civilization makes the church an institution that no true follower of Jesus Christ can afford to ignore.

No one could hope to give a full appreciation of the church in a brief article. Many important things remain unsaid. Seasoned Christians would speak of the church as a divine institution, keeping alive the spirit of Jesus and the apostolic tradition. They would say it should be united, holy and world-wide, the bride of Christ, gateway to eternal life. Most of us would gratefully confess the church as the mother of our souls.

The oldest and most important organization in all the world extends her hands to you in glad welcome that you may secure a more complete salvation, and that you may become a truer and better Christian, a better citizen, and a conscious member of the universal brotherhood of man. What is your answer to this gracious invitation?

BOOKS FOR PULPIT PREACHING

Continued from page 2

homiletic ideas to challenge and delight any pastor. A rare insight and discernment has made the author a preacher's preacher and one of America's most quoted writers. (Harpers, 191 pp., $3).

Beginnings in Theology by Jack Finegan is a distinctive book which makes theology understandable, significant and almost exciting. In a non-technical language, the author interprets the great matters of faith so that the layman may comprehend the traditional beliefs peculiar to Christianity. This book ought to be available to church leaders everywhere. (Association, 244 pp., $3).

Come As You Are by O. H. Austin is a series of devotions with a somewhat bewildering sub-title, "42 Non-Pious Meditations for Ordinary People." This will not, however, prejudice the reader against the sermonettes which are appealing in theme and rather intriguing in content. The main sections have titles such as: Bored with Yourself, When the Going Is Tough, Faith Looks Up, and Peace in a World of Turmoil. (Abingdon, 110 pp., $1.50).

Many pathways are opened to the reader of *Outline Studies in Acts* by W. H. Griffith Thomas. The 113 outlines feature the various passages of Acts and indicate innumerable sermon possibilities and topics. (Eerdmans, 555 pp., $4.50).

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WORTH QUOTING

Continued from page 2

think there is nothing strange in this familiar procedure. You see the scientist at work in his laboratory, and you know that sooner or later his experiment may succeed. Because you cannot see faith, you may doubt that it is a strong power, creating the only riches. But it is the greatest force in the world. At every hand the universe is yours, ready to fill your every need. Yet you may be reluctant to trust the same law by which the seed is brought to harvest. You may doubt that that same power would stoop to concern itself with you.

O. H. Austin in *Come As You Are* (Abingdon)

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G. K. Chesterton once remarked, "We have found all the questions that can be

found; now we need to find the answers." Science has found out much of how the universe works, but it does not profess to tell what it means. Science describes how men behave but does not pretend to say how they ought to behave. Philosophy often so emphasizes open-mindedness that we come to see many possible answers without being able to find any single one that convinces us. I was told that after a lecture on immortality by a distinguished speaker, the people who heard it knew everything there was to know about immortality except whether or not the lecturer believed in it. Now we would like to find not just questions but, in some way, answers that are convincing. In such a situation, theology has a definite role, for it is somewhat like three-dimensional photography: it is an attempt to see into the depths of things.

Jack Finegan in *Beginnings in Theology* (Association)

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The Bible is not only a book of human witness. It is a book of divine witness too. This is not because its words are the "infallible dictation" of the Spirit of God: such a notion destroys the essential truth about the Bible as human testimony. It is divine witness because the Spirit of God uses the words of the Bible—as they are read, taught, preached, expounded—and brings them home to the heart of the reader or hearer. When I receive the witness of the Bible, and I know that this message is true for me, that is because the divine Spirit has caused the truth of the testimony to "come alive" in my heart. It is then that I know that the Bible is true, and that God addresses me through it. This is the miracle of biblical revelation. Then my reading of the Bible becomes for me an experience like that of the two disciples on the road to Emmaus: the Spirit of the risen Christ is expounding to me in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself. As readers we cannot, of course, prearrange the occurrence of such a miracle of revelation. We can but prepare the way of the Spirit. Human effort can do no more than that. We can but plant and water; it is God who must give the increase. But as readers we can do as much as this: study the Bible conscientiously, as a record of things which have happened and how the prophets and apostles interpreted these things. We have not to apologize for the Bible, but to open it and let it bear its own witness.

Alan Richardson in *Twentieth Century Bible Commentary* (Harpers)

EVERETT W. PALMER
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Catch the Foxes, the Little Foxes

EVERETT W. PALMER, First Methodist Church, Glendale, California

Catch us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vineyards.
—Song of Solomon 2:15.

Here is a practical word of advice appearing in a most unlikely place. We find it in an ardent, romantic poem; in the midst of a fair maiden's exuberant confession of love for the man who is her sun, moon, and stars. There we come upon this pedestrian folk-saying of the countryside: "Catch us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vineyards."

Unless we resort to use of allegory by which Scripture can be made to serve any whim of imagination, it is difficult to understand why that proverb appears in such a setting. It is kin to coming upon Benjamin Franklin's "Early to bed and early to rise makes a man healthy, wealthy, and wise" in Elizabeth Barrett Browning's "Sonnets From a Portuguese" or finding in the text for "I Love You Truly" some such aphorism as "It takes a lean horse for a long race."

But no matter what device of circumstance or prompting of the Spirit put such a saying in such a place, still it speaks a wise word. It points to the need for mastering minor irritations, the little foxes which may slip past our defenses quite unnoticed and spoil many a vineyard.

All we treasure is subject to their attack. Do we have concern for health of body and peace of mind; happiness in our heart, home, and daily labor; success in our life work; usefulness to God and man; the condition and destiny of our soul? Then there is reason for us to heed the wisdom of "Catch us the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vineyards."

OUR VULNERABILITY

First, consider how vulnerable we are.

Most of us stand up to adversity with amazing courage and competence when it strikes a few giant blows and then is done. When Mr. Trouble comes at us like a squadron of dive bombers, usually we can take it like the Rock of Gibraltar. But the constant nibbling and gnawing of the little foxes, the petty irritations of every day, they are the threat!

William M. Elliot has quoted a poem of home-spun wisdom:

It aint the trees that block the trail,
It ain't the ash or pine;
For if you fall or if you fail
It was some pesky vine
That tripped you up and threw you down—
That caught you unawares.
The big things you can walk around,
But watch the way of snares.

And in this connection he observes: "By and large, it is the little things that defeat us. We stand up rather well to the major tests of life, but irritating nothings wear us down. We rise nobly to meet and handle the . . . great emergencies; we meet some serious illness grandly; we face up to some shattering loss with courage and serenity, but we fall in a heap before petty annoyances. Big things call out the heroic in us, but small things get us down."

C. S. Lewis, Oxford Don, in his now famous book, *The Screwtape Letters*, speaks to the point. The book is comprised of letters written by Screwtape, an under-secretary in the dominion of Hell, to a lesser devil on earth known as Wormwood. They are cultivating a prospect for Hell. Screwtape sends many a letter filled with wisdom in the gentle art of snaring unsuspecting souls for Hell, as Wormwood works on their client. Upon learning the man has joined a church, Wormwood is despondent. Never fear, Screwtape counsels, we'll get him yet. Just don't let him see the Church "spread out through all time and space and rooted in eternity, terrible as an army with banners." Rather, just let him see the usher who is an oily hypocrite, "faces in the next pew . . . Provided that any of those neighbors sing out of tune, or have boots that squeak, or double chins, or odd clothes . . . there lies our opportunity." Work hard, he concludes, to keep him irritated by petty annoyances in the Church. That will get him for Hell."

Ah, it is the foxes, the little foxes, that spoil the vineyard.

TECHNIQUES FOR CONTROL

But, how to catch them! How do we keep

petty irritations under control? That is the issue. From the experience of many generations, two dependable techniques arise.

We can accept them; that is, we can learn to live with the fact that irritations of one kind or another are inevitable.

A splendid biography of Leonardo da Vinci makes special mention of sanitary conditions which prevailed in the castles and cities of medieval Europe. There was little or no provision for disposal of garbage and offal beyond heaving it out the nearest window without even so much as a cry, "Look out, below!" That carry-over from the ways of primitive life which could be tolerated by nomads in sparsely settled regions created several problems in the stable and congested population of a castle or city.

The writer points to several hazards and discomforts. It was dangerous to ride or to walk through the streets. By night it was hazardous afoot. And there was danger from overhead by day and by night. You never knew when some preoccupied householder might unload unpleasantness upon you from a second or third story window. Of course, this practice gave rise to such a minor consideration as plagues. Worst of all, the writer says, it created a stench which beggars description. When we add to this the customary neglect of bathing typical of the times, one's imagination can fill in the rest. The rich made lavish use of perfumes to offset the odors which wafted into every room. But, says the writer, the poor learned to live with it. They accepted it as inevitable and went their way, happily.

Modern science has eliminated many of the hazards and smells of medieval days. Also, it has manufactured a few; for instance, smog, Los Angeles traffic, and television commercials.

Evidently, so long as there are people there will be an ample suppy of irritation, enough little foxes to keep every vineyard in jeopardy. Several months ago an earnest citizen who had been making a detailed study of smog came up with this analysis of the problem: people make smog; to eliminate smog, get rid of people. We hope eventually there will be a better solution, but for the time being that seems to be the answer so far as smog is concerned. Unfortunately, we can be certain that when we either have eliminated smog or resigned ourselves to gas masks there will be other irritations rising from the benefits of science; such as the howl of jets or empty beer cans dropped from a sky full of helicopters.

And what must be admitted respecting the contributions of science is no less true regarding husbands, preachers, even churches. Any human being, anything comprised of human beings, as well as anything made by human beings has imperfections that irritate other human beings.

Apparently our fellow citizen's analysis of the smog problem applies to all irritants: People create petty irritations; to eliminate such annoyance, get rid of people—including ourself. Should we prefer to remain on earth and have at least a good man Friday, to say nothing of a wife, husband, or preacher to share our solitude, then we must learn to live with petty annoyances, to accept them as inevitable and be happy.

RISE ABOVE THINGS

Another suggestion for bringing the little foxes of small irritations under control is this: rise above them. As day by day we go forth to live amidst trivial things that would get on our nerves there are some great words of the Apostle Paul which speak to our need: "Whatsoever things are true . . . honest . . . just . . . pure . . . lovely . . . and of good report; think on these things."

Someone has said that John Wesley had a kingly disregard for trifles. In his constant travels by horseback up and down eighteenth century England, "he knew," says one historian, "as much about bad weather, bad roads, bad beds, and bad food as any man who ever lived, but he summed it all up by saying, 'By the grace of God I never fret; I repine at nothing, I am discontented by nothing.' "

Must he ride all day with a cold winter rain beating into his face and trickling down his back; his horse constantly slipping and stumbling into bog holes? Does an innkeeper give him a poor bed and a miserable breakfast, a village vicar insult him, a band of ruffians attempt to break up a meeting? It mattered not. He took it all in stride, viewing it as nothing to be compared with his high calling in Christ. He looked upon all England, Ireland, Scotland and the world as his parish. He had big business to do for Jesus Christ. He would permit no annoyance to return his mind from its task, sour his spirit, waste his strength.

His accomplishments are nigh unbelievable. He traveled on land by horse 250,000 miles in all kinds of weather over roads scarcely worthy the name; preached 42,000 sermons; authored 441 publications ranging from a four-page tract to a three-volume commentary on the Old Testament; was the master of six languages and considered one

f the best-read men of his times; earned and ave away the equivalent of more than a nillion dollars; sponsored humanitarian pro-ects and gave rise to social reforms whose benefits all mankind enjoys; sired a religious wakening which swept the English-speak-ng world and has grown, within the short pace of 200 years, into the largest "free hurch" on the earth—a denomination known s Methodism. All of that from one man vith a frail, once tubercular body, barely opping five feet in height.

How did he do it? Part of the secret is his: he had a kingly disregard for trifles. He rose above petty irritations, lived above hem.

GOD'S HELP

Do we want to give our best intelligence o our work and have our full strength avail-ble for it? Do we wish for happiness in our eart, our home, and our daily work? Do ve wish for peace of mind and for the peace f God? Do we yearn to give Jesus Christ naximum use of our life in His service for nankind? Then we must let God help us row in that grace which is a kingly disre-gard for trifles. We must rise above the annoyances which creep into every day.

Every vineyard of life is subject to the raids of foxes, the little foxes of petty irri-tations. Usually we stand up surprisingly well against the onslaught of adversity when it comes upon us like a giant and then is gone. But the constant gnawing and nibbling of the little foxes, the continual annoyances of every day, they are the menace! Usually it is the little things that defeat us, defeat everything God would do in and through us.

Two dependable techniques for mastering them have emerged in human experience, each of which supplements the other. One, we can accept them; that is, learn to live with the fact that irritations of one form or another are inevitable. Two, we can rise a-bove them; centering our minds upon things true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report.

This is guidance for living, skill in living, which God in His wisdom and mercy makes possible for each of us.

Catch us the foxes,
the little foxes,
that spoil the vineyards.

The Bow in the Cloud

LOWELL M. ATKINSON, St. James Methodist Church, Elizabeth, N. J.

I do set my bow in the cloud, and it shall be for a token of a covenant be-tween me and the earth. And it shall come to pass, when I bring a cloud over the earth, that the bow shall be seen in the cloud; and I will remember my covenant, which is between me and all flesh. — Genesis 9:13-16.

The ninth chapter of Genesis is one of hose Bible passages that have very deeply nfluenced my life, and I believe that you, oo, will be greatly inspired when you make our own the insight of this chapter of God's Word. It is literally a "wonderful" chapter, for it is filled with wonder. The symbol of God's grace appears in the instrument of the world's destruction — the rainbow in the cloud. The very elements of doom create the ovely colors of the rainbow. The very judg-ment of God is bright with hope. The wonder f God's eager goodness and radiant love shines through the storm clouds of His holy wrath in the colorful grace of the rainbow. The heart of man should glow with wonder t the richness of God's promise here.

Yet it is precisely this sense of happy wonder that is absent from our coldly effi-cient civilization. The poet Wordsworth realized that "the world is too much with us" and in his own way sought to remind men of heir lost heritage of wonder. So he looked t the sky and gave us these lines:

My heart leaps up when I behold
A rainbow in the sky.
So was it since my life began
So is it now I am a man
So let it be until I die.

What have we got in the place of a happy appreciation of the wonders of the sky? A collection of scientific facts! Once the chil-dren said:

Twinkle, twinkle, little star
How I wonder what you are
Shining up above so high
Like a diamond in the sky.

But now the sophisticated youngster cool-ly announces:

Twinkle, twinkle little star
I do not wonder what you are.
What you are I know quite well
And your component parts can tell.

Our material knowledge is a betrayal if it robs us of the wonder of spiritual expectan-cy. In this hour of worship we shall explore

the spiritual meaning of the bow in the cloud, and not its chemistry.

RAINBOW OF HOPE

It may seem like carrying coals to Newcastle or owls to Athens to speak to young people about hope. There is a common notion that young people are hopeful. Yet at the risk of being misunderstood we insist that young people are hopeless. That is to say, they have not learned the secret of hope. To be sure they possess vital energy and surging enthusiasm, and great and glowing ideals. But they do not easily gain that insight that reveals the bow in the cloud, the wonderful promise that shines even in shadowed hours and difficult experiences. When youth's idealism is confronted with great obstructions, such as human greed, then the idealism usually is first baffled, then crushed, and finally succeeded by blank despair and bitter disillusionment, as though the end of the world had come. But hope is precisely the staying power of the spirit that clings to ideals when facts contradict the ideals and thwart their fulfilment.

The mature person knows that calamities often seem to be the end of the world, but also he knows that life will go on beyond the end of the world. Beyond the flood of destruction are yet more threatening clouds, but in the clouds he sees God's rainbow of hope. So it is true that youth must learn to hope through spiritual experience to cling doggedly to their ideals no matter how impossible they seem in a selfish world, to see with eyes of faith God's goodness shining through life's storms, to wonder at the promise of the bow in the cloud! This is the mark of maturity—to know that life goes on beyond the end of the world, to cling to a determined and resolute and expectant faith in God's wonderful goodness until the rainbow can be seen in the cloud.

THE CLOUD

"When I bring a cloud over the earth." God brings the cloud. It takes a virile and robust faith to say that. The sovereignty of God is not broken by the tragedies of life. Beyond human distress is the Divine Providence. Our hopes are based on the adequacy of God. As it is expressed in the last book of the Bible, there is a rainbow around the throne of God. The basis of our wonderful faith is the character of God. Men may fail us, but God is a Friend who never fails. When earth crumbles, we still have our Universe. Long ago the Psalmist sang, "Though I fall, I am not utterly cast down." That is the mature hope of a man of faith. An American poet has captured this insight in the line, "If my bark sink, 'tis but to another sea."

We have lost this understanding of life because we have lost the Biblical idea of God the Father. There is nothing soft or sentimental in the Biblical idea of a father. He is one who has power of life and death over his children, and to whom perfect obedience is due. There is no word for religion in the Old Testament, but there is the great phrase, "The fear of the Lord." Our God is a great God and one to be revered, "Clouds and darkness are His habitation"; and it is He who brings clouds over the earth.

BOW IN THE CLOUDS

"I do set my bow in the cloud." God sets the bow in the cloud. It is but a superficial faith that trusts God in sunshine and complains of clouds. The deeper Biblical faith trusts God through sunshine and storm, light and darkness, prosperity and adversity. The hopeful faith by which great believers live is the faith that God brings the clouds and that God sets the wonderful rainbow of promise in the cloud. All sunshine makes a desert. It is also true in life that God knows best, and mingles sunshine and rain, fair days and stormy in our experience, for our true good.

The Hebrew weaver worked on the wrong side of his rug and saw only the rough ends of the threads. From time to time he would walk to the other side of the rug and there he saw the pattern. So in life our experiences often are seen as loose ends, meaningless fragments without pattern. We can endure anything if we see purpose in it. The basis of hope is the belief that God purposes our good no matter how difficult life's experiences. God sets a rainbow of promise in the cloud.

> Well roars the storm to those who hear
> A deeper voice across the storm.

God always sees the pattern, even though man cannot see it. When we enter the greater life of Heaven, we too shall look on the right side of the rug; we shall see the pattern as God sees it; and we shall see the wisdom of hope. Our faith that "all things work together for good to them that love the Lord" shall one day be knowledge; that which we now see as through a glass darkly, one day shall be seen face to face. The wistful hopefulness of faith shall become the confident assurance of knowledge.

When clouds overshadow life, look for God's bow in the cloud! Disappointments do come, but they deepen faith and strengthen character. Loneliness is bitter, but it may teach a young person that to be liked he must make himself likeable. Pain may create sympathy and new understanding. Failure can quicken to new effort and teach resiliency of spirit. Sometimes a very ridiculous story serves to keep a great truth in mind. There is a humorous story of the 40,000 ants. A man was learning to play golf. After a little instruction, he addressed the ball, took a great swing, and missed the ball entirely. However he hit an anthill and killed 10,000 ants. Once again he made ready, took a powerful swing, missed the ball, and killed another 10,000 ants. The remaining 20,000 ants quickly ran together for a council of war, and their leader said, "Men, I think we had better get on the ball." So disaster teaches new wisdom!

When Augustine planned to go to Rome, his mother, Monica, was deeply distressed. She knew very well her son's weakness of character and susceptibility to temptation. Rome was the very cesspool of vice of the Roman Empire. So Monica prayed earnestly that God would prevent Augustine from going to Rome. Her prayer was fervent and earnest. Her concern was for the soul of her son. Yet even while she prayed, the wind was filling the sails of the ship that carried Augustine to Rome. Her request was denied. Her son went to the great, wicked city. Yet note what happened. Augustine looked around in the city of Rome, saw its debauchery and was thoroughly disgusted. He made his way to Milan. There he heard the great preaching of Ambrose. Augustine was captivated by the powerful intelligence of the preacher. As time went on, he began to appreciate the moral and spiritual power of Ambrose as well. So it came about that Augustine was made ready for the great moment when his life was given to God. Monica's prayer was denied, but her deeper hope was fulfilled, and Augustine became a Christian. The reckless youth with the powerful mind became the Christian man whose intelligence was dedicated to Christ. He became the schoolmaster of a thousand years and more, the mightiest mind of Christendom. There was a time when Monica could see only clouds; yet God set a bow in those clouds!

COVENANT OF GOD

"And I will remember my covenant which is between me and you and every living creature . . ." God's promise is a covenant between God and every living person on earth.

God and you—this is the picture of true religion. God makes His covenant with each living person. His Providence is over each of His creatures. His gracious purpose touches each life. God offers His friendship to each man. When God speaks, and man responds, we have that living covenant relationship that is the very heart of true religion. God offers His promise to you, and you are invited to respond to Him in love and faith. Not only to Noah or to Augustine is God's promise made, but to all flesh—to you and to me!

How better can you describe religion than by the Biblical method of telling stories of the wonderful friendship of God and man. The great stories of the Bible tell of God entering the living experience of living men. True religion is best understood by reminding ourselves of the Bible stories we know so well: Abraham venturing in faith at God's summons and accepting the divine guidance and challenge to new adventure; Moses speaking with God "as a man speaks to his friend"; Joshua dedicating his courage to God and receiving the promise of the great companionship, "Surely I shall be with thee;" Gideon, the uncertain hero, being transformed by God into a tower of strength; Ezekiel rising to his true dignity as a man when God commands, "Son of man, stand upon thy feet"; God's supreme meeting with man in Jesus Christ, who seized the end of the rainbow and fastened it forever to the earth, saying, "Lo I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." And into the Christian era, the great friendship of God with man goes on. The glory of God's mercy is seen in the Cross of Christ and God's moral and saving friendship delivers men from fear and guilt and futility, bringing them into a new world of light and love and courageous endeavor. So John Wesley died as he lived, in the wonder of a great companionship, saying, "The best of all is, God is with us." So David Livingstone entered into the life of a strange people and shared danger and privation with men of an unlighted land because the love of Christ constrained him. When asked the secret of his missionary energy, he spoke quietly of Christ as his companion, and laying his hand on the New Testament, said, "It is the word of a gentleman."

The great men of faith know that we need not walk alone. Ours is the promise of an everlasting covenant of Divine companionship. God and Moses; God and Livingstone; may we not add—God and you?

Yet we are tempted to trust material things when we should trust God's personal friendship! But material things can give no peace in our spirit. We are tense and restless and sometimes desperate, and the very badge of modern civilization is the neurotic mind and the ulcered stomach. Yet God's promise is still valid. His bow still beckons us to faith when His cloud comes over the earth. His everlasting arms still offer our true security.

Dr. Harris Kirk, of Baltimore, tells this story of his childhood. His nurse was a wise old woman, who used to rock him to sleep in a very rickety rocking chair. One night, when the chair creaked and groaned as if about to collapse, the Mammy sensed the little child's fear. Her arms tightened around him and she said softly, "It's all right, hone chile, I'se got you." Yes, when this rickety world seems about to collapse, we too may feel those Everlasting Arms tighten about us, and hear the voice of God renewing His covenant of hope as He says softly, "It's all right, you need never be afraid again; I've got you."

Keeping Up with Life

PHILLIPS PACKER ELLIOTT, First Presbyterian Church, Brooklyn, N. Y.

So run that ye may obtain — I Corinthians 9:24.

Life moves so swiftly that we feel in constant danger of being left behind. Like the commuter who each morning races after the train that he almost misses, so we have a sense of pressure to catch up with what has taken place. One fails to read the papers for several days, and then has quite a task catching up with the news. One goes away for a time, a week or so, and when he returns must have a long talk with a friend in order to catch up with the personalities and events which have developed while he was away. Life seems to be going faster than we are, and the constant question is how to keep up with it.

In the ninth chapter of First Corinthians, Paul is thinking of life as a race. It is a natural comparison and one which we still use. In the Greek world the stadium was more important than the temple. This was quite unlike the emphasis of the Jews, and Paul was a Jew. But he was also enough of a citizen of the Greco-Roman world to know the appeal that reference to the games would have. So he writes to the Corinthians; nine miles from whom was the great stadium where the Isthmian Games were held every three years, telling them to "so run that ye may obtain." He could probably visualize the setting of the contest and the enthusiasm which was generated there. He knew that the Corinthians would at once recognize the validity of his illustration as it applied to the spiritual life.

Or perhaps he used this illustration because of a personal weakness of his own, a physical ailment which he described as "a thorn in the flesh." There have been many conjectures as to what this was, epilepsy being the most frequently urged. Whatever it was, it held him back, and like many others who, having indifferent health themselves, stressed the virtues of physical vigour. so Paul stressed the importance of running in the games. He was aware, too, of the spiritual parallel in his own life, and that those to whom he wrote had to run hard in order that they might obtain.

We place this figure before our minds. therefore, knowing that our Christian experience is a race, a race not to win over others. but to win what life has to offer. God has put much here for us, and we are to obtain it if we can. How then shall we keep up with life?

RACING FOR QUALITY

We are, in the first place, to recognize that this is not so much a matter of racing for time as it is for quality. It is this with which we are to keep up. Life has several dimensions. It has length, and to this we most frequently refer. The Psalmist said that the length of life was "three score years and ten," but now with medical advances we have made the normal span longer than this, nor do we think of the subsequent years as being "labor and sorrow." We usually think however of length when we speak of "catching up with life," as we meditate upon the things we want to do before our race has been run. But life also has the dimension of depth, it embodies the "deep things of God." It has rich meaningful experiences which are available to those who explore them, who try to keep up with them. It also has the dimension of breadth, with an embrace wider than we have seen or appreciated, a vast extent of fellowship which will lead us on from the small area in which we live, and which is continually stimulating us to catch up.

This is not to say that the time dimension

not important, for it is. Some people always come late and they miss out therefore in life's riches and life's opportunities. Our language is full of stress upon the importance of time. "Time is of the essence." Emerson said, "There is a nick of time in matters which reach into eternity." The author of the Proverbs wrote: "A word in due reason is like apples of gold in a basket of silver." We want to be up to date. We should know what is emerging in life. The newspapers could be described as a form of devotional reading. This does not mean that it is necessary to line up on Saturday evenings waiting the Sunday edition of the *Daily News*, but it does mean that one cannot help his world unless he knows what his world is like and what is going on in it. He must be alert if he would be of help.

ALERTNESS

Jesus was constantly stressing this alertness. "Watch therefore, for ye know not the day or the hour," he said. He told the story of the wise and foolish virgins awaiting the bridal party, the wise having oil in their lamps and the foolish having to go away to buy oil and thus missing the opportunity to enter when the party came. It is important to see the issue when it is an issue, and we are ineffective both as citizens and as Christians, if we do not know where the right and wrong are engaged, and cast our vote and influence on behalf of what we believe to be the right. One must keep up with life in the sense of time.

Yet keeping up with "the latest" can become a false and misleading role. Some people seem forever breathless, trying to follow the latest fad and the latest book and the latest song. Dr. William Adams Brown, for many years Professor of Systematic Theology at Union Seminary, once startled his class of students by saying that he never read a new book on theology. He read only the old books. He waited until a new book had become old, tested and tried by time, before he gave any attention to it. This can be overdone of course, yet we now overdo a tendency to think that because something is new it deserves our primary attention. For one is not in a backwater of life just because he is away from the center of the newest invention and the greatest noise. It is with the quality of life that we must try to keep up.

KEEPING UP TO THE BEST

Now it is hard to keep up with the best. In so many ways we are misled and trapped. Often the quality is lowered, even as we try to keep up with certain aspects of life. Think for example, of "keeping up with the Joneses," this much used and abused family. This is said to be a vice particularly in the suburbs, but it is a universal trait. Each person wants to be abreast with another, each family wants to be as highly regarded as its neighbor.

But what this often means is keeping *down* with the Joneses. It is possible to be so eager to keep up with the life around that one accepts standards far lower than one really approves. Think of it in connection with serving liquor in the home. People often apologize for it, saying: "We don't care for this ourselves, we don't believe in it, but our friends who come here expect it, so we serve it." So the home abdicates to the Joneses; they come in and take over, and a man is no longer the lord of his own castle. It belongs to those with whom he is trying to keep up, but with whom he is actually keeping down. So in many ways the attempt to be abreast of life falls behind the standard.

Our Lord told people of the kind of life he wanted them to keep up with. He showed them what the best kind of life was. He spoke of life a great deal. Few words were on his lips more than the word "life." It was this that he brought to people as his chief gift. He did not want them to miss it. He said that he came that they might have it, and might have it "more abundantly." Man is intended to have his full share of life, to keep up with the abundant life which Jesus gave.

LIFE'S DEMANDS

And we do keep up with this kind of life as we hear and heed the demands that it makes. Life is pushing us more than we realize. It passes us by only because we refuse to answer it, to yield to it. The current rushes around us and we feel ourselves left behind because we are immovable like a great stone that the stream cannot budge. We fail to keep up with life not because we are insufficiently eager for it, but because we are not obedient enough for what life asks us to do.

For it does give instructions. And they are nonetheless important, because they seem non-enforceable. People feel that they can with impunity scorn the requests that life brings, because it cannot punish refusal to obey them. Life cannot make a person reliable, loving, useful. But ultimately these laws are enforced, and the person who refuses to abide by them finds that he is falling

far behind, and instead of living abundantly, he is static and useless.

This then is what it means to "lay hold on life" as the phrase has it in Charles Wesley's hymn. So Christian people try to take hold of life at certain points. They grasp the handles which are given to them by their Christian experience. It simply means worship for by the fact of worship we are brought abreast of life and made ready for whatever it brings. It simply means using the Bible and so grasping the words of life that are there, that we are made ready for life each day. It simply means the habit of prayer, together and alone, repeated again and again, so that one is sufficient for whatever life brings. It simply means holding the figure of Christ before one, and feeling him as a friend beside one, and thus walking with him, being abreast of life each day. These are the means by which we lay hold on life and no one is ever behind if he starts each day and each year in the presence and awareness and with the blessing of God.

Long ago is was written by the greatest of Israel's prophets that this was the way men were to keep up with life, that this was the secret: "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall mount up with wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." And who can doubt that these words from his fathers were in the mind of Paul as he wrote to the Corinthians reminding them of the games with which they were so familiar, and saying "so run that ye may obtain."

Up Front with God

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From one point of view Jesus was a man who seemed always to be working in reverse. His words seemed designed to anger the religious leaders of his day, the people who might have helped him. His stringent demands seemed to defeat his very purpose of bringing men to know God. If only he could have been a little less critical and antagonistic. If only he had not tried to change the thinking of the people so drastically. Then perhaps his message would have been more graciously received. Who knows, he may have lived to be an old man.

There is little use, however, in speculating how Jesus' life might have been different. There is less reason for trying to excuse the stand he took and the words he spoke. Jesus did not go about treading on religious traditions and contradicting man's way of thinking simply for the sake of being a nuisance. A man does not give up his life for something in which he does not earnestly believe. It is of first importance that we read his words against the backdrop of his own day and of ours to understand that his teachings are not backwards. But the world is upside down. When one places a straight stick in a jar of clear water, the stick appears to be bent. So the truths of Christ, immersed in the sea of sin which bathes the world, must appear to be falsehoods.

The passage of nearly two thousand years finds us still shaking our heads over many of the teachings of Jesus and wondering if that's what he really meant to convey. Let's look at a few and imagine some of the reactions. "If your brother sins against you forgive him seventy times seven." Brother or no brother, four hundred ninety times is too much. "If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." Now that's down right foolish! From these examples it should be seen that there is a deeper meaning in these teachings than meets the eye. The first is simply another way of saying that forgiveness is to go on as long as someone wrongs you. There is no end to forgiveness. The four hundred ninety-first-time when one can stop forgiving is never reached. The second statement introduces the pitfall of revenge which can so poison a person's life that he lives for nothing else but to "even the score." It is certainly not advocating cowardly yielding, but is saying that good will is the Christian reply to willful injury.

PATHWAY OF ACTION

More often than not, however, the meaning of Jesus's words are understood all too well, the pathway of action is all too clearly marked. But for one reason or another we hesitate to move. Such a statement is this: "For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." To illustrate what he meant by this Jesus told a story. We usually refer to it as the parable of the Pharisee and the publican. It is important to note that Jesus addressed the story to those who trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others. This attitude toward others is a natural consequence of self-righteousness, as we shall see.

"Two men went up into the temple to ray." Thus far the men could be two of any who went daily. The "one a Phari-ee, the other a tax collector." Suddenly ie scene takes shape in the minds of those ho hear. The Pharisee was a pillar of the urch, an ardent patriot, a strict adherer the multitude of rules in Jewish religion hich defined the way one should live to-ard God. It was not difficult to see in ie mind's eye the confident assured pace ith which he walked into the temple. In-eed, it was most natural that he should ter there. But the tax collector, ah, that as more perplexing. To one who had seen ie tax collector or publican just a few hours efore sitting at his table in the public uare collecting taxes on transfer of prop-ty, land taxes, death duties, his very pres-ce at the temple must have caused wonder. he title of publican was synonymous with at of sinner and he was despised as much the Pharisee was respected Having been red by a Roman overseer to collect taxes om his own people he was regarded as a aitor to his country. He could and often d extort more money than he had a right and pocketed the difference. What kind prayer would he offer in the temple?

The answer comes with the description of ie prayers, so different, so betraying of ie true character of each man. The Phari-ee prayed with himself. God becomes al-ost a third party as the Pharisee lifts him-lf to righteousness by comparing himself ith other men. He was not an extortioner, t unjust, not adulterous, not even like the blican standing afar off. And there is no dication that he was a liar. Religiously eaking, he had a clean bill of health. But ere is more. "I fast twice a week and I ve tithes of all that I get." These facts e not impressive unless it is realized at only one fast day a year was prescribed d that a tithe was required only of cattle d the produce of the field. The Pharisee sted twice a week, and gave a tenth of all at he received, from whatever source, even plants such as dill, and the seeds of plants, ch as cummin. The publican, in marked ntrast, stood afar off. Undoubtedly he re-rded the Pharisee as a righteous man and d not deem himself worthy to stand near m. Rather with bowed head and hands eating his breast in prayer, "God, be merci-l to me, the sinner." Gone for the mo-ent was the knowledge that he was but one many sinners. "The sinner" and as if the ns of others were as nothing by compari-n with his own.

GOD'S THOUGHTS

Now the story takes that characteristic twist which impales the pride of the hearer upon its point and proves again that God's thoughts are not our thoughts. For it is the publican who goes away justified in the sight of God. No doubt it is only in God's sight that he is justified. Anyone seeing the two men leave the temple would almost certainly choose the Pharisee as being the one approved by God. But God looked at their hearts. He found the Pharisee's heart full of self-approval. He found the publican's heart full of repentance. Both were seeking the good will of God. "The one expected God to endorse the good opinion he entertained of himself, the other begged God to be merciful to him, notwithstanding his sin," as A. B. Bruce has written. From God's standpoint the one who confessed his lack of righteousness was more worthy to be considered righteous than the Pharisee who was already righteous in his own estimation. Because the publican confessed his sin and asked for mercy, God could do for him what he was not able to do for the Pharisee who did not believe himself in need of God's mercy. The publican's sin remained. God did not condone his past actions. But even as the penitent tear of an old man converted by a child's prayer was the gift in a familiar story, which opened the gates of heaven, so the penitent prayer on the part of the publican was the key that unlocked the door of his heart to God.

Let us examine this story now to find the lesson it holds for us today. First, it shows that there is the danger of so identifying our correct actions and our abstentions with approval from God that righteousness is a gift and not an attainment. And, finally, it shows us that God in his mercy will forgive anyone who truly repents of his sin.

The first lesson is one which applies especially to religious people, to church members, to Christians if you please. For men and women who have not committed the more obvious sins and flagrantly broken the law of God the confession of sin in a worship service and in one's private devotions is often meaningless. "I am no law breaker, I have never committed a crime, I am not dishonest in my business, furthermore, I attend church every Sunday, contribute to the various charities and am a good citizen." And so we can add to our list of virtues until we begin to wonder if there is really anything drastically wrong with us. Oh, perhaps we lose our patience once in a while,

lay down on the job a bit, cut a corner here and there, but as for sinning—No, sir. But the publican standing afar off cried, "God be merciful to me." In our efforts to be respectable we have thrown up a dividing wall between the terms "sinner", and "non-sinner." On one side of this wall are placed all who have been branded by society or law to be undesirable in their actions and purposes. On the other are all who are doing their best to be good people, Christians included. But in our desire to gain respectability we have overlooked the truth. The apostle Paul writes to Rome, "For there is no distinction; since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God." There is no sin more terrible than pride, for behind its veil the necessity of confessing our sins is lost. In the words of Reinhold Niebuhr, "The final proof that man no longer knows God is that he does know his own sin." For when we know him who sent his only son, when we look at our lives in the light of what he did for us on the cross, our halos are knocked askew, our smug satisfactions fade and we fall to our knees in shame. My friends, I submit that if we build such a dividing wall and regard ourselves as people who are not deserving to be called sinners, we are falling into the exact sin of the Pharisee. We are usurping the power of God and giving ourselves the approval that is only his to bestow.

GOD'S REQUIREMENT

In Luke we read, "When you have done all that is commanded you say, 'we are unworthy servants, we have only done what was our duty.' " Our best efforts fall short of the divine commands. We are sinful because we are human. Only God is without sin, and, therefore, only God can forgive sin. "Against thee, thee only have I sinned, and done that which is evil in thy sight," cries the psalmist. Therefore, "purge me with hyssop and I shall be clean; wash me and I shall be whiter than snow." And what does God require in order that this might be done? "The sacrifice acceptable to God is a broken spirit, a broken and a contrite heart." It is not enough simply to know that we have failed to be all that God would want. It is only when the heart and spirit break against the fact of Christ's obedience unto death for our sakes that we are able to accept the forgiveness which God offers us in Christ.

The final lesson to be found in the parable is undoubtedly the most wonderful. The picture of the publican with God's approval upon him is the picture of hope and comfort for every one of us today. It portrays the words of the Bible. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness." Can you see the possibilities? For many a person today is living the consequences of the past. "There is no road back. That day, months, years ago they made their choice: and today it is burning their hands and they would like to throw it away, but they cannot."

> The Moving Finger writes; and having
> writ,
> Moves on: nor all thy Piety nor wit
> Shall lure it back to cancel half a line,
> Nor all thy Tears wash out a Word of it.

Our hope lies not in trying to forget the past or in punishing ourself for what has happened. Our hope is in the mercy of God who waits to renew the broken relationship that we may again know him . Our hope is in one who many years ago willed to give up his life for you and for me.

Can it be true that God forgives sin? Millions have found it so. We have Jesus' own word for it. Will you believe it?